

Creating shared campus experiences: the library as culture club

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As health sciences librarians embrace and invent new roles, library buildings can also adapt to support new services and programs, frequently serving as a campus cultural space. On a health professions campus, faculty, staff, and students are frequently focused on their schools or programs rather than on the greater campus community. It is not always clear who is ultimately responsible for introducing and championing new technologies, supporting relevant or topical campus or community cultural activities, or even providing education in, and support for, scholarly communication activities that appeal to the entire community. This kind of outreach can fall within the philosophical, educational, and leadership mission of librarians.

Librarians have long been pioneers in innovation related to the organization and dissemination of knowledge. Librarians are in one of the most technologically engaged of academic disciplines. Evidence of the value librarians place on technology and in consistent monitoring of its advances can be found in the recent creation of emerging technology positions in many academic libraries. Libraries have also historically served as cultural hubs, particularly public libraries, and university libraries can take on this role with relative ease. Librarians are important partners in the world of scholarly communication and research: research begins at the library, and the product of research often ends up there. It is natural that librarians keep abreast of the trends and policies affecting the movement of bench research to the journal literature. Opportunities can be created that support and provide programmatic leadership for all these efforts to the university community.

Librarians identify strongly with users, understand institutional culture and politics, have a commitment to academic and intellectual

values, and show a readiness to collaborate with people within and outside of the institution [1]. Their neutral and apolitical interactions with faculty and academic leaders are a critical strength. These are strengths that position librarians to be effective arbiters of the intellectual and cultural needs of a campus. With no particular agenda and the ability to see the big picture, librarians can assume the role of trusted third party in discussions between and among differing interests for the good of the campus.

Librarians can also selectively introduce culture to their user group, for instance, via storytimes for children, readings, curation of gallery space, and many other activities that make them partners in creating a social narrative. Melissa Goldsmith and Anthony Fonseca speak movingly of the participation of libraries in campus culture:

The library has a history of offering space for artistic expression and for protecting intellectual freedom. It goes far beyond cafés, museums, free-speech alleys, student unions, and other public places, since it simultaneously offers opportunities for further reading (additional information) and new avenues for creativity, research, and other applications.

The library can contribute to the institution's community through events, displays, and exhibits generally in more ways than departments, colleges, and other on-campus venues because it offers access to print and electronic materials. Its space receives exposure to interdisciplinary traffic (people studying many fields) and can thus encourage dialogues. [2]

Libraries themselves are cultural icons. From Alexandria to Adam Smith to the smallest mini-library placed in a payphone kiosk, libraries are considered "among the most important of human institutions" [3], accumulating and storing knowledge, disseminating accurate information, supporting intellectual freedom, and working toward the public good. More than anything

else, libraries and librarians are trusted [4]. While there may be some problems with perception—shushing and "it's all on the Internet"—libraries and librarians should leverage their cultural currency, taking advantage of this trusted position to advance ideas that are important to the library profession and to stakeholders.

At the University of Maryland, Baltimore, the Health Sciences and Human Services Library (HS/HSL) team seized opportunities to develop a variety of events designed to meet various technological, cultural, and educational needs that were not being met elsewhere on campus. Some examples are daylong symposia, an ongoing scholarly communication series, and cultural exhibits related to the mission of the library and the university.

Since 2002, library staff has planned four daylong symposia: "@Hand: Mobile Technologies in Academia and Medicine" (2010); "Are You Connected: Social Networking Tools for Collaborating, Teaching and Learning" (2008); "Ownership and Access in Scholarly Publishing" (2005); and "PDA Fair: A Day of Handheld Technology" (2002). The themes for symposia are generated from throughout the library: in casual conversations, in meetings, or from questions that arise from the service desks. Suggestions for topics come from every corner of the library. Themes may also be suggested by members of the university community.

Each of the daylong symposia has been partially funded by the National Network of Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM). These awards have covered many of the symposia expenses. The NN/LM award application also encourages thoughtful planning for the symposia. The application requires a description of the goals for the event, identification of the intended audience, a budget outline, and a timeline. These are the first steps in planning.

Each of the four symposia offered a keynote speaker and additional invited speakers who served as panelists. In some events, a series of workshops was offered, as were presentations by university personnel, vendor exhibits, and, in the case of technology-based symposia, an on-demand consultation service and technology sandbox. It was important not only to offer an authoritative overview of a topic, but to provide the practical tools for faculty, staff, and students to apply what they learned. The days are designed so that people can attend specific sessions of interest. For these symposia, space throughout the HS/HSL was used, including gallery space, classrooms, and reception areas.

The scholarly communication series is dedicated to providing the university community with focused programming in this one area. In contrast to the daylong symposia that require six to eight months to plan and upwards of twenty staff to manage multiple types of program content, symposia in the scholarly communication series are two to five hours long, offer a streamlined program, and require several months to plan. Within the past three years, we have offered three such symposia: "Publishing Connect Event on Publishing Ethics" (cosponsored with Elsevier, October 2011); "Issues and Challenges in Faculty Research Evaluation: Creating an Environment for Research Excellence" (April 2011); and "Publishing and the *New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM)" (2010). The symposia in the scholarly communication series are planned by library administration and a small team of librarians from the resources and services divisions, with external partners such as NEJM and Elsevier providing support for the symposia.

The HS/HSL hosts about six cultural exhibits a year in the Frieda O. Weise Gallery. With a professional picture hanging system and 1,200 square feet of space, the HS/HSL brings in fine art, photography, and sculpture as well as traveling exhibits from the

National Library of Medicine and other organizations. Recent exhibits hosted by the HS/HSL have included "Information for All?: Open Access and the High Cost of Scientific Information" (2012); "Harry Potter's World: Renaissance Science, Magic and Medicine" (2011); "Wounded in Action: An Art Exhibition of Orthopaedic Advances" (2010); and "Frankenstein: Penetrating the Secrets of Nature" (2010). The library often uses these exhibits as opportunities to offer special activities based around the theme of the exhibit. Activities have included brown-bag lectures from university faculty, workshops, and receptions. Thematically linking a special program to the exhibit is a way to promote both the exhibit and the HS/HSL and provide networking opportunities between library faculty and the university community. For example, during the *Harry Potter* exhibit, a School of Pharmacy professor taught a "Potions Class." To explore medicine in the time of Mary Shelley as part of the *Frankenstein* exhibit, a social work faculty member presented on alienation and the monster, and a preeminent surgeon spoke of the history and future of transplantation. All events were well attended.

Special events are tailored to the exhibits. The exhibit, "Information for All?: Open Access and the High Cost of Scientific Information," resulted from collaboration with the university chapter of the American Medical Student Association. The president of the organization was eager to educate medical students about the open access movement and approached the library to collaborate in developing a program. A librarian participated on a panel discussion on open access at the School of Medicine. To complement this, a team from the HS/HSL designed an exhibit using photography, media, and artifacts to illustrate the rising cost of journals and show how these costs inhibit the sharing of scientific and medical research. The HS/HSL director provided opening remarks about the benefits of open access, followed by a reception attended by library staff and students.

Here are some considerations and advice that have worked well for our library when planning symposia, the scholarly communication series, and events based around cultural exhibits. These might not work for all libraries; it will depend on the institution and the type of event planned.

Take the time to plan

All events, be it a daylong symposium or a movie night supporting an exhibit, require a certain level of planning. The larger the event, the more involved the planning might need to be. Large planning committees and subcommittees may need to be formed. For an event with a more contained scope, a small group of librarians and staff may be all that is needed. Planning for these events is a unique opportunity for collegiality and collaboration within the library. Planning should not be limited to librarians: HS/HSL staff have taken an active role in planning events and provide a unique point of view and essential skillsets. Working on planning these events provides librarians and staff an active opportunity to gain leadership and program planning experience.

Develop a promotion plan

Publicizing events is an essential part of planning and takes a variety of forms. It may be as simple as sending out emails to the university community, putting a banner announcement on the library's website, or highlighting the event in a library newsletter. Larger events require developing an event website, designing a special logo and promotion materials, or creating an online registration portal. Publicity is essential for promotion and university buy-in.

Find partners

Successful events at the HS/HSL would not have been possible without partnerships for funding,

program ideas, and promotion. NN/LM is a possible resource for funding. Some awards from NN/LM are designed to support technology fairs and community events. The community is also an invaluable resource for developing partnerships. An annual event at the HS/HSL is the President's Outreach Council Art Exhibit, in which local middle school and elementary school students exhibit and auction off their art to support programs at their schools. The library provides the space for this event, which allows a much larger audience—the public—to have access to a fairly closed university setting. Publishers are also partners to consider. They may be eager to collaborate on programming to address issues in research and publication. The HS/HSL has had great success in collaborating with publishers to design program content that appeals to university faculty.

Have fun

A university library can be a serious space for research and study, but that does not mean cultural events cannot provide fun for participants. A discussion on publishing ethics does not allow the same type of programming that the "Magical World of Harry Potter" exhibit from the National Library of Medicine offers. However, there are opportunities for diverse and fun-filled activities when appropriate. This could be a snack break at an exhibit, a demonstration from a faculty member showing the scientific properties of potions, or a

discussion of the ethical issues of transplantation. Serious users of the library building are always warned about possible disruptive programming.

The HS/HSL faculty and staff have assumed a campus leadership role in developing educational and cultural programs for the Baltimore campus of the University of Maryland. The programming is regarded as a success and a model for other events. These programs were cited frequently during recent campus strategic planning meetings as models for effectively bringing the university—with its six professional schools—together. The development of different modalities for these programs has enabled creative and consistent outreach. Building shared experiences at a university, where disparate groups gather together, is a challenge. It has elevated the appreciation for library staff and engendered an awareness of our diverse and valuable abilities.

Clearly, there are opportunities for and interest in the library serving as an active programmatic space. The advantages of perceived neutrality coupled with a creative, willing, and progressive staff add to the educational and cultural life of an academic health center. These opportunities create shared experiences and elevate discourse among diverse campus groups supporting larger institutional goals of interprofessionalism and interdisciplinary engagement.

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